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ABSTRACT

This paper describes early outcomes of a Sacramento, California, elementary school that participated in the Accelerated Schools Project. The school, which serves many minority and poor students, began training for the project in 1992. Accelerated Schools were designed to advance the learning rate of students through a gifted and talented approach, rather than slowing it through remedial instruction. The project is based on the following principles: (1) bringing all children into the mainstream; (2) empowering the school site; and (3) building on strengths. After approximately one and one-half years, decision making in the school had shifted to the cadres (small advisory/planning groups), the steering committee, and the school as a whole. Regular meetings and an inquiry process were under way, and faculty collaboration increased. The school's unusually rapid transformation is attributed to its high level of readiness and strong leadership. Other project outcomes included increased enrollment, decreased student suspensions and absences, and improved standardized test scores. Extensive notes contain reference materials. (LMI)

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THOMAS EDISON ACCELERATED ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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March 1994

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THOMAS EDISON ACCELERATED ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

A major challenge of our time is to meet the educational needs of the large numbers of children in at-risk situations. School practices are not neutral about who succeeds. Children from families with both parents present, substantial parental education and income, and a middle class version of U.S. culture and the English language tend to have school experiences which value and build on their backgrounds. In contrast, students from immigrant, minority, and poverty families often face a serious discontinuity between their out-of-school experiences and what schools require for success. Schools rarely find constructive ways to embrace the experiences of such children, relegating many of them to failure. Nationally, students in at-risk situations have increased rapidly, accounting for up to 40 percent of elementary and secondary enrollments.¹ In California, the numbers have risen even more quickly with a majority of students perceived to be in at-risk situations.

In this respect, Thomas Edison Elementary School in Sacramento is a prototype of the California challenge. Edison is one of 51 elementary schools among the 89 schools in the San Juan Unified School District. Over the past five years Edison and four other elementary schools within the district, have started facing "urban" challenges. In the fall of 1989, Edison had a total of 360 students of which 36 percent were receiving public assistance under

Aid for Dependent Children (AFDC) and Free or Reduced Cost Lunch, the mobility rate was approximately 30 percent, and only English was spoken. Behavior was a problem that year with a total of 103 days of suspension, primarily for fighting. There were 7 robberies in which audio-visual equipment was stolen.

Just three years later, in 1992-93, the school's enrollment had grown by one-third to 494 students of which 80 percent were on AFDC and Free or Reduced Cost lunch. Thirteen different languages were spoken. But, contrary to what might have been expected from changes in the student clientele, the mobility rate had dropped to 23 percent, student behavior had improved with only 34 total days of suspension and there were no break-ins for the school year. And test scores of the sixth graders on CTBS had risen in all three areas tested.

Edison's early success in meeting its challenges are due to a major transformation of the school that has been undertaken by Edison staff, students, and parents. Edison is one of the expanding number of over 500 schools in 33 states (in 1993-94) that are following the Accelerated Schools process to bring all students into the academic mainstream by the end of elementary school and support that progress at the middle and secondary levels. Before describing how that process was implemented at Edison, it is important to provide background on the Accelerated Schools Project.

I. ACCELERATED SCHOOLS PROJECT

The Accelerated Schools Project was initiated in the summer of 1986 as a thirty year project that was designed to respond to the

needs of at-risk students. Four years of previous research on at-risk students and their schools came to rather stark conclusions about their challenges.² Such students started school without many of the skills that schools valued and got farther behind the educational mainstream the longer that they were in school. Over half of the at-risk population did not graduate from high school.

The research found that the inability of existing schools to advance the education of at-risk students is hardly an accident. Most schools that enroll such children embrace organizational, curricular, and instructional strategies of remediation that lead to reduced expectations and stigmatization of at-risk students, uninspiring school experiences, and a devaluing of the rich talents of students, teachers, and parents. In the absence of change, students are subjected systematically to an experience that will assure high failure rates.

In contrast, Accelerated Schools were designed to advance the learning rate of students rather than slowing it by transforming instruction from a remedial approach to a gifted and talented one.

Educators usually reserve acceleration programs for students who are the top performers. In contrast, remedial instruction reduces the pace and quality of learning to accommodate student weaknesses. The consequence is that schools systematically track students to produce (perhaps inadvertently) a self-fulfilling prophecy in which those with the most educational advantages are propelled forward at faster rates than those from at-risk backgrounds.³

Research has found that acceleration and enrichment work for all students.⁴ Recent work on the identification and nurturing of talent argues the efficacy of enriched instructional practices and curriculum for all students.⁵ Indeed, Accelerated Schools have shown substantial gains in student achievement, attendance, full inclusion of special needs children in the mainstream, parental participation, and numbers of students meeting traditional gifted and talented criteria.⁶ They have also reduced the numbers of students repeating grades and produced substantial numbers of research projects and writing accomplishments of students.

A Strategy for Change

Although a design for Accelerated Schools had been developed by the early Spring of 1986,⁷ it was not until the 1986-87 school year that the ideas could be tested. Starting with two pilot schools in that year, the movement had grown to over 500 elementary and middle schools by 1993-94 and 10 regional centers. Although the basic ideas can be found even in our early writings, application of these ideas was challenging and has required continuous refinement as experience has provided new insights. A strategy for creating accelerated institutions required three major changes in U.S. schools, changes that were in deep conflict with current practices.⁹

(1) Unity of Purpose

Most schools that educate at-risk students seem to lack central purpose. They are comprised of a composite of programs that are largely disparate and piecemeal with no central vision.

Teachers tend to see their responsibilities extending no farther than good practices in self-contained classrooms, while remedial specialists work in isolation from each other and the regular school program.

Acceleration requires the establishment and pursuit of a common purpose that serves as a focal point for the efforts of parents, teachers, staff, and students. Such unity of purpose in an Accelerated School focuses on bringing all children into the mainstream, where they can more fully benefit from stimulating, school experiences. Unity of purpose must extend to the actions, beliefs, practices, and commitments that transform school actions rather than just a statement posted on the wall. The development of this unity requires the combined efforts and commitment of all students, parents, and staff.

(2) School-site Empowerment

Existing schools for at-risk students are largely dominated by decisions made by entities that are far removed from the school site and classroom. Federal and state governments and central offices of school districts have established a compendium of rules, regulations, directives, policies, laws, guidelines, reporting requirements, and "approved" instructional materials that serve to stifle educational decisions and initiative at local school sites. Instructional packages developed by distant publishers are often more potent determinants of the details of daily life in each classroom than the professional judgements of teachers. It is little wonder that administrators, teachers,

parents, and students tend to blame factors "beyond their control" for the poor educational outcomes of at-risk students.

An Accelerated School requires that school staff, parents, and teachers take responsibility for the major decisions that will determine educational outcomes. If the school is to achieve its dream of educational success, administrators, teachers, other staff, parents, and students must participate in making informed decisions regarding school activities. Important areas of school-site decisions include some or all of the following: curriculum, instructional strategies, instructional materials, personnel, and allocation of resources inside of the school. Responsibility for decisions also requires responsibility for the consequences of those decisions, a system of informed decision-making and accountability. Such decision-making requires active support from the district's central office.

(3) Building on Strengths

Schools with large numbers of at-risk students point to the inadequacies of their students, funding, administrative support, and so on as explanations for poor performance. Heavy emphasis is placed on the litany of what is wrong with at-risk students and their parents. It is the preoccupation with weaknesses and deficiencies that leads to low expectations and wholesale remediation. But, good pedagogy begins with the strengths and experiences of participants and builds on those strengths to overcome areas of weakness.

Accelerated schools seek out the strengths of their students and other participants and use those strengths on which to build school practices. In this respect, students are treated as gifted and talented students, where strengths are identified that are then used as a basis for providing enrichment and acceleration. The strengths of at-risk students are often overlooked. These include not only the various areas of intelligence identified by Gardner and his Associates,¹⁰ but also areas of interest, curiosity, motivation, and knowledge that grow out of the culture, experiences, and personalities of all children.

The process of building on strengths is not just limited to students. Accelerated schools also build on the strengths of parents, teachers, and other school staff. Parents can be powerful allies if they are placed in productive roles and provided with the skills to work with their children. Teachers bring gifts of insight, intuition, and organizational acumen to the instructional process, gifts which are often untapped by the mechanical curricula that are so typical of remedial programs.

Combining the Principles

An Accelerated School is not just a conventional school with new principles or special programs grafted onto it. It is a dynamic environment in which the entire school and its operations are transformed. The emphasis is on the school as a whole, rather than on a particular grade, curriculum, staff development approach, or other limited strategies. The goal is high academic achievement and healthy human development for all students.

The three principles of unity of purpose, site-based empowerment, and building on strengths are woven together in virtually all of the activities of the Accelerated School. The school is governed by its staff, students, and parents, and priorities are pursued by task groups that follow a systematic inquiry process for problem solving, implementation, and evaluation.

Accelerated schools use a "powerful learning" approach that reflects high expectations for student success and a close link to student culture, experience, and interest. Active learning experiences are provided through independent projects, problem solving, and applying learning to concrete situations. By applying academic concepts and skills to real-life problems and events, students see the usefulness of what they are learning. The creative arts are also viewed as a vehicle which build on and enhance student strengths.

The organization of Accelerated Schools allows for a broad range of participants and a collaborative approach in which students' families play a central role. Indeed, success depends on parents working with staff and students, helping to make school decisions by participating in the decision bodies of the school.

Decision-making in Accelerated Schools

At the heart of the accelerated school is the emphasis on site responsibility for the educational process and outcomes.¹¹ To make this a reality, there must be an appropriate decision-structure built around the school's unity of purpose and an effective

decision process. We have found that three levels of participation are necessary to encompass the range of issues that must be addressed in an a democratic, but productive way: the School as a Whole; the Steering Committee; and Cadres.

The School as a Whole (SAW) refers to the principal, teachers, teachers' aides, other instructional and non-instructional staff, and parent representatives as well as student representatives. The SAW is required to approve all major decisions on curriculum, instruction, and resource allocation that have implications for the entire school.

At the opposite extreme in terms of group size are the cadres. These represent small groups organized around particular areas of concern for the school. Where the concern is a continuing one such as curriculum or parent participation, a cadre is formed. In the case where the concern is episodic, such as the planning of new facilities, an ad hoc committee is formed for the duration of the task. The major guideline for forming cadres or committees is to create as few as possible, always looking for ways to combine related responsibilities and to dissolve entities that are no longer needed so as to avoid an overburden on staff.

The cadres are the groups that do most of the analytic and preparatory work such as defining specific problems that the school faces and searching for and implementing solutions. Before implementation begins, the recommendations of task and policy committees must be approved by the Steering Committee, and in some cases the School as a Whole. The cadres build on the comraderie,

ease of communication, and motivations associated with small teams working together on a regular basis and building expertise through sustained exploration and investigation.

The Steering Committee consists of the principal and representative teachers, aides, other school staff, and parents. The purpose of the Steering Committee is to monitor the progress of cadres and ad hoc committees, and to develop a set of recommendations for consideration by the SAW. Steering committee members include representatives of each of the cadres in order to assure that the work of the cadres is coordinated at the level of the school. Cadres are expected to meet on a weekly basis, the steering committee on a bi-weekly basis, and the school as a whole on a quarterly basis or as needed.

The principal is responsible for coordinating and facilitating the activities of decision bodies as well as for obtaining the logistical support that is necessary in such areas as information, staff development, assessment, implementation, and instructional resources. A good principal in the context of the Accelerated School is one who is an active listener and participant, who can identify and cultivate talents among staff, who can keep the school focussed on its mission, who can work effectively with parents and community, who is dedicated to the students and their success, who can motivate the various actors, who can marshal the resources that are necessary, and who is "the keeper of the dream."

Accelerated schools require that school districts need to play a greater service role for individual schools than they normally

do.¹² Instead of serving as regulators of schools to ensure compliance of school activities with some centralized plan, the school district must provide support services to assist cadres and the steering committee in identifying challenges, obtaining information on alternatives, implementation, staff development, and evaluation.

While schools for at-risk students need considerable additional resources,¹³ the transformation to an accelerated school is one of qualitative change that can be done largely within existing resources. The major need is adequate time of staff for meetings, staff development, discussion, reflection, planning, and exploration of alternatives. In addition, a coach is needed to assist the school in building its capacity to accelerate the education of its students. The Accelerated Schools Project has a training program for such coaches and mentors their progress at the school site.

Building School Capacity

Accelerated School philosophy, values, and practices are largely alien to existing schools and school culture. Much of the transformation process in an Accelerated School results directly from exposure to a new set of values and practices that is followed up by daily reinforcement through learning-by-doing. As school staff and community work at it, they become experts at the process. The goal is nothing less than the "internal transformation of school culture".¹⁴

The entire school (including all staff, parent representatives, and student representatives) participates in all training. Between training sessions the school undertakes developmental tasks and practices a set of empowering skills in making decisions in areas of concern to the school. The overall training approach is based upon a constructivist model in which it is assumed that humans learn most effectively when they actively construct their own understanding of phenomena rather than being passive recipients of someone else's understanding.¹⁵ The training is built around a range of interactive endeavors in which groups reflect on a range of issues and respond by creating activities in which they must introduce the various dimensions of the accelerated school process to students or to parents. Coaches guide the school through constructivist activities as well as through questioning approaches rather than criticisms and directives.

Inherent in all of the training and school activities are the three principles which are embedded in the discussions and school practices. Specific values such as risk taking, community, participation, experimentation, equity, and the school as center of expertise are embedded in the premises and activities of accelerated schools training and practices. The school is also devoted to the continual development of powerful learning experiences. Since much of the work at school sites is done in groups, it is necessary to provide considerable training in group process and decision-making in a team context.

II. APPLYING THE MODEL AT EDISON

Staff development for the Accelerated School is initiated in phases. In the awareness and buying-in phase, the entire school informs itself about the Accelerated Schools model by viewing a video tape and perusing reading materials provided by the National Center or one of the regional centers and discussing the ideas. This is followed by visits to existing Accelerated Schools and extended discourse on what is learned and observed. At some point 90 percent of the entire school staff and student and parent representatives must support the commitment to move forward (an accomplishment that is met eventually by over 90 percent of schools that explore the model).

Awareness and Buying-in

In the fall of 1990, a "futuring" group of parents, students, and staff was formed to chart a course for Edison. This group spent its first meeting developing a comprehensive parent survey which was administered at the school's back-to-school night. This survey helped identify the challenges and goals the school faced. Key concerns identified were:

- o Dissatisfaction with the lack of continuity across the grades for curriculum and behavior management and with the way the imposed curriculum failed to meet the needs of the school community (increased numbers of limited English speaking students and at-risk students) with its diverse needs and abilities;

- o Declining test scores despite the liberal use of remediation, time and materials;
- o A school climate which was not fostering student decision making;
- o Limited community involvement and ownership of the school.

In response the group developed the following goals:

- o Find an "umbrella" for all the programs at the school that would also enable the school community to help make decisions about which programs to implement;
- o "Dream" about the ideal school for the students, especially in light of the rapidly changing society and a need for students to be empowered as decision makers;
- o Involve parents and students in meaningful ways in order that they begin to take ownership of their school.

After four months of meetings and research on major restructuring efforts nationwide, the Futuring Committee decided to view firsthand the Accelerated Schools Model by sending three teams of parents, school staff, and district administration on visits to two Accelerated Schools. After several more site visits it was felt that the Accelerated Schools model fit the goals of the school community, and six months were spent building consensus among the staff. The entire staff finally agreed to implement the Accelerated Schools Model in the late autumn of 1991.

The principal, Gene Chasin, had been in contact with the National Center at Stanford and now requested a coach. Normally the National Center would arrange with the school district for

nominations, interviews, and selection of a local coach who would get trained using constructivist methods and commit to weekly coaching visits to the school as well as formal staff development days. However, Chasin persuaded the Assistant Director for Training, Pilar Soler, to serve as a coach to the school until the school could build its own capacity.

Initiating the Process

Training of the Edison Community began in January of 1992. All of the staff development and activities incorporated both the full staff and parent representatives in a constructivist set of activities in which were embedded the Accelerated Schools principles, values, and focus on children. These first days of training provided the school with its first opportunity to engage in serious and widespread discussion about school philosophy and focus rather than just applying band-aids to problems. These two days culminated with an introduction to Taking Stock.

Taking Stock

Taking Stock requires staff, parents, and students to work together to establish baseline information on itself through group research that takes two months or more.¹⁶ Edison formed teams to explore each dimension of the school, establish research questions in each area, and identify and implement methods for answering the questions with the guidance of the coach. Using available documents and direct observations as well as tailored surveys and interviews of staff, parents, students, and community members, the teams worked together to compile a taking stock report.

The purpose of this activity is to begin the accelerated school process through a self-examination and the preparation of a written record of its status at the start to compare later with progress. The process of collecting, reporting, and discussing the baseline information contributes to a unity of purpose, empowers the school community to work together, and identifies strengths as well as challenges of the school while building collegial cooperation and research capacity of school staff.

Nine weeks were spent conducting surveys and collecting data to accomplish this. Many of the staff found the process to be frustrating initially because they wanted to start immediately and change the school without the time consuming burden of taking stock. However, over time the staff recognized this step to be vital in providing baseline data, creating a meaningful training ground for working together, and serving as a baseline for the school to use in measuring the degree to which it was meeting its challenges. This process also gave the school staff, and particularly its teachers, an overview of the entire school and what is happening in all classrooms - the walls were starting to come down. For the majority of the staff this was exciting, but challenging because it ran contrary to traditional school governance.

Developing a Living Vision

While Edison was gathering data to respond to its taking stock questions, it began its vision process.¹⁷ In a series of meetings of both the school as a whole and smaller components of staff,

parents, and students, the participants focussed on designing a dream school that would work for all members of the school community. Since the Accelerated School transitional process is expected to take about six years, that is the time period for which the participants project a new vision of their school. This phase required considerable reflection, discussion, and decision-making. It also drew heavily upon the dreams of individual staff members, students, and parents and their abilities to work together to create a collective dream which will become their destiny.

The fact that the development of vision was part of an ongoing process at Edison and included parents, students, and staff meant, that in comparison with the school's past mission statements, this was a living, breathing document rather than just a collection of words. The vision statement had meaning for all stakeholders and has evolved over time as the school has achieved its earlier goals and established more ambitious ones. It took participants a great deal of time and some emotion-charged discussion to understand this difference and to agree on a statement. The school's first vision statement was:

The vision of Thomas Edison Accelerated School is to achieve:

- * High academic standards for all
- * A nurturing safe environment
- * Active community involvement
- * Respect for individual differences

- * Students educated to become confident productive citizens

Although these words may not differ much from past statements or those of other schools, it is the concrete understanding and commitment behind the words which has made this an active vision for Edison rather than just a collection of words.

This meaning was very evident as Edison celebrated its Vision Day. After all of the hard work spent developing its vision, a day was planned to unveil it to the community and student body. The staff and students planned a performance called "Working Together" which explained the school vision. But more than this, the day was an emotional one in which all students and staff and many parent and community representatives became personally involved in connecting to the Edison dream. All of the classes of the schools performed their own versions of the dream as interpreted through songs, raps, readings, art, dance, and discussions around the future vision for Edison Accelerated School.

Choosing Priorities and Governance

Having finished its taking stock and vision, Edison began the process of identifying its top priorities and establishing its system of governance.¹⁸ With the assistance of its coach, a staff development day was devoted to comparing the details of the vision (not just the abbreviated vision statement) with the details of the taking stock report. It was obvious that there was a large gap between the vision and the existing situation. School staff were

asked to work on setting out all of the things that must be done in order to move from the present situation to the future vision.

The school met in plenary to take the list of what needed to be accomplished. No organization can work effectively on more than three or four major priorities at a time. The task facing the staff was to select those three or four priorities through discourse and discussion. Areas identified by Thomas Edison School were: self esteem, curriculum and instruction, budget and public relations, and community involvement. This agreement on priorities was followed by the establishment of the first cadres, one for each priority area--the small groups that would work on these priorities--and assignment of staff to each group, usually through self-selection. The Steering Committee was established with participants from each cadre as well as the principal, parents, and at-large representatives of teachers and support staff.

At this point in the training it became clear that several of the teachers were becoming uncomfortable with the knowledge that was shared regarding the type of instruction desired for all of the school's children. Four teachers opted to leave during the first year--two who transferred to other schools and two who retired. These moves created opportunities for the school because new teachers were hired who believed in and were committed to the philosophy and process.

Staff Development and Practice

By this time almost five months had elapsed from the beginning of the process, and four full staff development days had been used

as well as weekly meetings of participants and a few early release days. The school was now ready to adopt the full decision process. This process must be gradually embraced by school staff, students, and parents and practiced in an exemplary way by the principal, cadres, the steering committee, and school district liaison personnel. It requires training and regular practice in working together to address challenges through a systematic inquiry process that defines clearly the issues and specific hypotheses on why the problem exists. Data are collected to see which ones hold water. Once the cadre narrows the problem to a specific cause or causes, it needs to seek out alternatives for addressing it. Finally, it chooses a solution or strategy, which if ratified by the steering committee and school as a whole is implemented and evaluated for results.

Edison was trained in both the inquiry process and group dynamics to launch the work of the cadres and steering committee.¹⁹ Such capacity building is an on-going activity, particularly over the first year where formal training is followed by daily practice and assessment. Edison also received continuing training in constructing "powerful learning" situations, the establishment of an integrated approach to curriculum, instructional strategies, and school climate and organization that builds on strengths and accelerates learning.²⁰

The Edison staff's familiarity with the governance model of accelerated schools proved critical to its early success in following the process. Through the active involvement on cadres,

representation on the Steering Committee, and periodic meetings of the School as a Whole, all of the stakeholders perceived their roles as influential. Having all stake holders actively involved was also critical to the incredible energy and momentum that was generated. The Inquiry Process proved very appealing to site administrators and District Office staff because it ensures that all decisions are made only after thoroughly researching the situation, and are based on what is best for the students. The school community found that practice was needed to firmly imbed the process in the school after being habituated to quick decisions and short term solutions.

Initially, many participants did not see the need for school research until they experienced success with the process. After more than a year it is now second nature. Early struggles with this problem solving process included distrust of peers and the amount of time it took to carry out inquiry. Only after repeated experience with the process did these concerns diminish.

Throughout the 1992-93 school year the cadres met regularly to work through the inquiry process in their areas. During the problem phase of inquiry they did considerable research including library research, expert consultation, and surveys of students, parents, and staff. Above all they focussed on how to bring powerful learning into the school in all of its aspects including identifying strengths of students, staff, and parents; and building on those strengths by transforming the overall dimensions of the school: organization and climate, curriculum, and

instructional strategies.²¹ Powerful learning represents an important overall focus of the Accelerated School and permeates the activities of every Edison classroom and cadre, the steering committee, and the school as a whole.

Among these activities, the family and community involvement cadre focussed on ways to improve home-school communication, In the problem phase of inquiry they found that staff and parents felt that the system for communicating pupil progress was inadequate. Specifically, concern was raised about the effectiveness of the mid-quarter deficiency notice issued to all students receiving unsatisfactory grades. That cadre explored potential solutions that would encourage a dialogue between the parents, student and staff and provide useful information which ultimately would empower the child. These solutions were put into an action plan that was approved by the steering committee and school as a whole for pilot testing and evaluation. After the pilot period the plan was further revised to address needs identified by the pilot evaluation. This revised plan was returned to the steering committee and school as a whole for final approval.

During 1992-93 many changes took place in the school that derived from the early work of the cadres and the overall philosophy and practices from the Accelerated Schools training. For example, the move to active learning was pronounced as well as a far more supportive emotional climate for students and staff. Parent participation expanded along with both schoolwide multicultural events and the introduction of multicultural

awareness across the curriculum. Cadres were exploring establishment of a very active learning approach to science and a new reinforcement system for good attendance and behavior of students,

Early Results

At the time that this chapter was prepared, Edison had been in the Accelerated Schools process for only eighteen months. This is a short period relative to the five-to-six years that the National Center believes is required for complete transformation of a school. To get an idea of the rapidity of change at Edison it is important to give a glimpse of what the school was like immediately prior to the introduction of the Accelerated Schools process. Perhaps the most important adjective to describe the school was that it followed "traditional" practices. For example, as recently as 1991-92 the school had sponsored pull-out Chapter 1 services and specialist programs. By the end of 1992-93 these services were offered in classrooms, resulting in a smaller effective class size, and a schoolwide writing program as well as integrated and thematic curriculum became common.

In 1991-92 Edison operated under a traditional style of management. Many decisions were being made at the state and district levels with the school responsible only for implementation. The principal and school staff did not have a method for addressing specific school needs and concerns. The school community felt little ownership of the school. Parent participation was minimal despite newsletters and family events--

being concentrated for the most part in the kindergarten program. By the end of 1992-93, decisions had moved to the cadres, steering committee, and school as a whole with regular meetings and an inquiry process, and staff were taking responsibility for both decisions and their consequences.

Prior to the launching of the Accelerated Schools process, traditional teaching methods were used in self-contained classrooms with a heavy reliance on textbooks and curriculum. There was little active student involvement and input in the classroom. Teachers were working in isolation within their classrooms with little knowledge of what was being taught in the room next door. By the end of the 1992-93 school year, teachers were working together to develop new approaches around the powerful learning concepts that had been introduced. Teachers and students reported in a survey that classes were more exciting, stimulating, and challenging.

The Accelerated School Project does not expect that the mere act of launching an Accelerated School will create an immediate payoff in terms of systemic change. Implementing the Accelerated Schools process and transforming decisions into school change takes time as does the move from a traditional to an accelerated culture.²² However, Edison had an especially high level of readiness due to the wide dissemination of information and excitement generated at the time of its "buy-in" to Accelerated Schools. In addition, it had the benefit of strong leadership, a principal and staff who had mastered the concepts of Accelerated Schools so fully that they have participated recently in the

training of new coaches for Accelerated Schools. These two factors have resulted in a quicker transformation than is typical with strong early results. For example:

- o Enrollment grew from 371 in 1990-91 to 489 in the Fall of 1993-94. The additional enrollment was due mostly to parents from other attendance areas who decided to enroll their children at Edison under the district's open enrollment plan.

- o Student suspensions declined from 103 in 1991-92 to only 34 in 1992-93.

- o Uncleared absences declined from 866 in 1991-92 to 59 in 1992-93, and tardy or truancy referrals fell from 47 to 34 over the same period.

- o Despite rising numbers of at-risk students, test scores rose. CTBS reading scores for grade 6 rose from the 44th percentile on national norms in the Spring of 1991 to the 55th percentile in the Spring of 1993. During the same period, language scores rose from the 42nd to the 46th percentile, and mathematics from the 38th to 47th percentile.

As impressive as these changes are, it should be noted that Edison was a relatively new Accelerated School at the time that this was written. The transformation process is a continuous one in which the School's understanding of its needs, its proficiency at using the inquiry process, its ability to apply powerful learning, and its embrace of the philosophy and values deepen considerably over time. This sense of excitement, inspiration,

dedication, has been translated into the belief that Edison's dream around all of its children is also its destiny.

Notes

1. Gary Natriello, Ed McDill, and Aaron Pallas, Schooling the Disadvantaged (New York: Teachers College Press, 1990). Henry M. Levin, Educational Reform for Disadvantaged Students: An Emerging Crisis (West Haven, CT: NEA Professional Library, 1986).

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